

WEST

Generate Collection

L2: Entry 1 of 7

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TITLE: Screensaver messaging system

ABPL:

A screensaver method and apparatus provides a communication system for a computer which allows a visitor to an office or workspace to leave an electronic message. A screensaver program is installed on a personal computer which provides a dialogue box on the display screen after a predetermined period of inactivity. The dialogue box includes areas for a computer user to provide instructions for visitors to the office to enter messages as well as places for the visitor to, through use of the mouse and keyboard, enter and transmit an e-mail message for the computer user. Once the message has been entered and the user transmits, the screensaver communications program converts the entered message and other information to a predetermined format and transmits it to the assigned destination address. The computer user who was absent may then upon return, remove the dialogue box from the screen and access the e-mail message.

BSPR:

A business tool which is located in most offices and workspaces and may be used for communications purposes is the personal computer. A personal computer with a network connection may be used to send and receive e-mail messages in addition to a number of other business functions. Because the replacement or repair of computer components may be expensive, various devices have been developed in order to extend the life of the components of a computer. One device in particular is the screensaver which is employed to extend the life of a display monitor for a computer. Screensavers usually activate after a predetermined period of inactivity of the computer, and usually generate an image which moves about the display screen in order to avoid burn in of an image into the screen.

BSPR:

The screensaver messaging system described herein may be incorporated into the operating system for a computer device, such as a personal computer. Included in the personal computer may be a central processing unit, a memory, a display as well as user input devices such as a keyboard and a mouse.

BSPR:

Included in the memory is a screensaver communications program. Part of the screensaver program is a display graphic for a dialogue box which may be displayed on a computer screen after a predetermined period of inactivity for the computer. The dialogue box may include designated areas for typing in information such as a title for the message, a name of a person leaving the message, as well as the message itself. The dialogue box may also be displayed for typing in a password such that the computer user may deactivate the screensaver and resume normal functions for the computer. Further, a hot key may be assigned on the keyboard for selective activation and deactivation of the screensaver function.

DEPR:

Disclosed in FIG. 1 is a system diagram for a computing device, such as a personal computer, which may incorporate the screensaver communications system described herein. As is well-known, a personal computer is made up of a number of different components. The central processing unit (CPU) 10 includes all the electronic components employed to perform the various computations. Attached to the CPU is a computer display 12 which presents the information to be viewed to the computer user. This display may be a cathode ray tube (CRT), or liquid crystal display (LCD). Other devices in connection with the CPU include keyboard 14 and mouse 16 which are used to enter and manipulate data which appears on the computer display.

DEPR:

The screensaver messaging system stored in memory provides the functionality for a visitor who comes upon a computer in which the operator is not present to leave a message for the operator through use of an e-mail program. As is well-known, screensaver programs are employed to extend the life of the computer display. The longer that an image is displayed on one part of the display screen the greater chance that it will burn into the screen and permanently damage the component. Thus a screensaver program presents an image or series of images which move around the screen in order to avoid burn in.

DEPR:

As part of the screensaver program, the present invention provides the capability for a visitor to an unattended computer with a connection to a data network, to enter a message through a display graphic, or dialogue box, which appears on the display screen. The screensaver program includes the necessary protocols to convert the typed-in message to an e-mail message and transmit the information to the desired destination address.

DEPR:

Disclosed in FIG. 2 is an example of a dialogue box which may appear on a computer display when the screensaver program is activated. After a predetermined amount of inactivity with regards to operations of the computer, the dialogue box will appear and according to the options entered by the computer user it may periodically move about the screen in order to avoid burn-in in a particular area of the display screen.

DEPR:

An important consideration in employing the screensaver communications program described herein is that sufficient security be provided such that visitors who come upon the computer may enter and transmit a message to the computer user, but may not have further access to information and applications on the computer. One option to provide this type of security is to password protect access to the system. As described above, the screensaver dialogue box will appear on the display screen after a predetermined period of computer inactivity. In order for a computer user to remove the dialogue box and resume normal operations, a hot key may be programmed into the screensaver program which, when depressed on the keyboard, removes the dialogue box from the display screen. In one aspect of the invention, once the hot key is pressed, a dialogue box such as that shown in FIG. 4 may be presented to the computer user. Through use of the mouse and keyboard, the computer user may enter the appropriate password and once this is read by the system, access is granted to the computer system applications.

DEPR:

Once access is granted to the computer system the computer may active or deactivate a number of custom features relating to the use of the screensaver system. Disclosed in FIG. 5 is a display screen 60 which a system user may access in order to customize the operation of the system. One function is whether to turn the system on or off. By entering either "on" or "off" in dialog box 62, the system may be either activated or deactivated. The time period before the screensaver activates may be entered through dialog box 62.

DEPR:

Disclosed in FIGS. 6a and 6b is a flowchart which describes in detail the operations performed by the screensaver communications program. As described above, the screensaver program also operates as a normal screensaver and monitors the activity of the computer user. After a predetermined amount of computer inactivity, the screen saver program activates, and a display graphic of a dialogue box for entering messages is displayed. If a hot key for activating the system exists, upon depression of this key or a sequence of keys, the dialogue box appears on the screen. The screensaver monitors the system until either of these events occur.

DEPR:

A feature which may be incorporated into the screensaver communications system is the ability to receive and display E-mail messages. Many E-mail systems currently provide the functionality to immediately send a reply E-mail message to an E-mail address from which it has just received a message. This allows the computer user to inform another party of his or her whereabouts if the message is regarding a time sensitive issue. In the invention described herein, the screensaver program is adapted to receive and display the automatically returned messages. This

allows the computer user to provide notification to every person who sends an E-mail or visits the office, as to the whereabouts and time of return of the computer user.

CLPR:

18. The method of claim 12 wherein a screen display is presented for entering custom information, the custom information includes at least one of: activating or deactivating the screensaver program, entering a period of activating before the screensaver program is activated, entering a default email address, entering a message which will be read by visitors, and activating and deactivation of a vacation mode.